

EXPLORING THE EMOTIONS: THE FILMISTIC STUDY OF LIKE WATER FOR CHOCOLATE

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ABSTRACT

The movie *Like Water for Chocolate* is directed by Alfonso Arau in 1992 which is based on the novel *Como Agua Para Chocolate* written by Laura Esquivel. She is a Mexican author and screenplay writer. She began her profession as a screenplay writer, writing plays for the kindergarten children for whom she taught. She has also written several kids' television programs. Her debut novel *Como Agua Para chocolate* has become a best-seller in Mexico and the United States, and it is later developed into a top-notch film. She has also incorporated magical realism, metaphors and symbolism to describe emotions and feelings of the characters. This adds discrete quality to both the film and the novel. The movie is artistically crammed with many symbols which put forward the theme of the fervent and influential narrative originally taken in the form of novel by Laura Esquivel. The story centres mainly on food. The symbolism of food in the movie is a depiction of hard work, the sense of feminism, responsibilities, roles, comfort, and craze.

Keywords: top-notch, magical realism, metaphors, symbolism, feminism, discrete.

The title of the film *Like Water for Chocolate* refers to 'the boiling water which is used to make hot chocolate'. Laura is married to Alfonso Arau, a film director and producer. The film is also considered as a 'food film' because food is the dominant symbol here. The movie is set in Mexico during the early nineteenth hundreds. The novel is written at the time of Mexican Revolution. So an impact of the revolution can be seen in the film too. Anne Bower has said that "Food has been part of film since films began, yet only

recently have we given extended attention to the many and sometimes startling ways that food functions in movies”(1-13).

The novel was originally written in Spanish and later translated into English. The book and the movie are runaway success and Laura has received a ‘Mexican Academy of Motion Pictures Award’. The movie is considered as the first Mexican film based on food and it also elucidates the relation between food and emotion. As Laura was brought up in a conventional family, she gives more importance to Mexican culture and tradition. It has been reflected in all her writings. She has got frustrated because some of the humours in her novels are not translated into English properly.

There are many prominent characters in the movie. Some of them are Lumi Cavazos, a famous Mexican actress who has won ‘Best Actress Award’ plays the role of Tita De La Garza, Regina Torne who acted as Mama Elena is a famous Mexican actress and a comedian, and Marco Leonardi, an Italian actor who has acted as Pedro Murquiz.

Throughout the film, the director has made the spectators to visualize the effects or the emotions one gets after consuming the food that is prepared by the protagonist, Tita. The opening scene of the film shows the birth of the heroine and the entire story has been narrated by Tita’s grandniece. Tita is so sensitive to onions. Nacha, the old servant tells that she could hear the cry of the baby even it is in her mother’s womb. The portrayal of magical realism suits well with the incidents.

Salman Rushdie is the author of the novel as well as the screenplay writer of the film *The Midnight’s Children*. Once Salman Rushdie was speaking at a press conference held during the London Film Festival, he was posed with the question, how did he tackle the magic realism on film? He replied that,

When people use the term magic realism, usually they only mean ‘magic’ and they don’t hear ‘realism’, whereas the way in which magic realism actually works is for the magic to be rooted in the real. It’s both things. It’s not just a fairytale moment. It’s the surrealism that arises out of the real. So if you can make it feel like that, then it works.

Tita is the youngest daughter of De La Garza family. She hopelessly falls in love with Pedro. When they meet in a party, Tita feels excited and wonderful. Her feelings are described in the novel as,

When she first felt his hot gaze burning her skin. She turned her head, and her eyes met Pedro's. It was then she understood how dough feels when it is plunged into boiling oil. The heat that invaded her body was so real she was afraid she would start to bubble - her face, her stomach, her heart, her breasts- like batter, and unable to endure his gaze she lowered her eyes. (LWC 18-19)

The particular scene in the film describes the concept of love between Lumi Cavazos and Marco Leonardi who plays the role of Tita and Pedro seems to be so realistic and authentic. This scene serves as a good example that the director has chosen the perfect actors for the characters.

Tita is not allowed to marry Pedro because of their tradition. In early Mexican convention, the youngest daughter of the family must stay single and take care of her mother until she dies. When Pedro's father approaches Mama Elena about Pedro and Tita's marriage, Elena tells them that Pedro can have the hands of Rosaura but not Tita. When Pedro and Rosaura's marriage gets arranged Tita is totally shattered and feels deceived.

Even after Pedro marries Rosaura, Tita and Pedro's love remains same. As time progresses, their love for one another grows stronger. Tita is forced to accept the fact that she could not marry her love and also to keep her feelings for Pedro concealed. Lumi has wonderfully expressed her sadness as if she has lost her real love in her life. Tita is in great pain and yet tries to move on with her life. But she cannot because she happens to meet Pedro daily. Mama Elena frequently warns both of them and she always keeps an eye on them. Tita cannot express her feelings to anyone so she bares her feelings to the food she prepares. Mark Twain in his work *Mark Twain on Common Sense: Timeless Advice and Words of Wisdom from America's Most Revered Humorist* has said that, "When the time comes that a man has had his dinner, then the true man comes to the surface". The food can do a lot to the people. It has a power to change the mood of the people. Likewise, the food she prepares relinquishes an emotional change in the people who ever have a bite

of it. Here Tita turns out to be the transmitter of emotions and the other people who eat the dishes prepared by her have become the receivers of the same emotions. This happens several times throughout the movie.

The feelings of a person can never be explained in words. The listener can only hear them but they cannot feel the same like the person who has experienced it. They can never really find the right words to make them fully understand. But through the film, Alfonso has made the spectators to feel the same as the characters. The readers might get baffled while reading the novel but they could understand and perceive the emotions clearly while watching the movie. The audience have no idea of what is going to happen when they visualize the film.

Throughout the movie Tita grows as a woman who tries to seek her own identity. Finally she stops obeying her arrogant mother and decides to live her own life. Tita has an affair with a doctor named John Brown who has treated her kindly when she is depressed. On hearing the death news of Pedro and Rosaura's son, she feels heartbroken. At the end of the movie, Tita and Pedro finally get to be together. This shows that true love has no end and it remains forever. The movie commences with her birth and concludes with their death.

The plot seems to be very interesting and true about life. It is a story not only about love, but also about the sufferings and growth of an individual woman. In the movie, Alfonso Arau paints an awe-inspiring picture of the transition and about the strong love that exists between Tita and Pedro through Lumi and Marco. The actors are very convincing and the music is very expressive. For example, when Tita cooks, her emotions can be felt by the audience. The spectators see Tita grows up right in front of their eyes. It definitely shows that love conquers all. A huge part of the actors is the main reason for the success of the film. From the major characters to cameos, everyone has done their role perfectly.

Though the film is simple to figure out, it has a lot of underlying meaning in it. It is impressive, rebellious, entertaining, and filled with the delight. The soft tones of light and music create a rural Mexican feel present throughout the film. The setting of the film and the music has enthralled the beauty of human emotions. Though it is a food film, it concentrates more on the relationship of the characters rather than foods.

Food also plays a significant role in the story because it connects senses with emotions and tradition.

It is evident in the novel as:

Just as a poet plays with words, Tita juggled ingredients and quantities at will, obtaining phenomenal results and all for nothing: her best efforts were in vain. She couldn't drag a single word of appreciation from Pedro's mouth. (LWC 64)

Tita actually craves to get appraisal from Pedro about the dish that she has prepared especially for him. The narrator of the novel mentions this line to describe the capability of an author as well as a chef to express their passions and emotions through what they create.

The only drawback in the movie is that it fails to illustrate the recipes as well, as the book does. Throughout the film, the audience can feel how the choice of a particular dish helps to characterize not only the female character, but also the Mexican national identity as a whole. Many times her food creates a magical power to make people laugh, cry and arouses an aphrodisiac quality.

The cinematography of the film reveals a great range, beauty and astounding theme. The film's lighting styles are fruitful in establishing the more realistic ranch house where many of the interior scenes take place. The director has focused more on Tita's ability to connect the people through food. The film serves as a wonderful feast to the audience whoever has interested in such genre.

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